IV

DEPENDENT ORIGINATION
(*PATICCA SAMUPPADA*)

CONTENTS

1. What is the Law of Dependent Origination?

According to this law, every phenomenon owes its origin to another phenomenon prior to it. It may simply be expressed as "depending on this, this originates". An example of Dependent Origination in nature is given below:

There being clouds in the sky it rains.
It having rained, the road becomes slippery.
The road becoming slippery, a man falls down.
The man having fallen down becomes injured.

Here a shower of rain depends on the clouds in the sky.
The road becoming slippery depends on the rain.
The fall of the man depends on the road becoming slippery.
The injury of the man depends upon his fall:

Conversely:
If there were no clouds in the sky, it would not have rained.
Then the road would not have become slippery.
Then the man would not have fallen.
Then he would not have become injured.

2. How does the Law of Dependent Origination work?

In this chain of events, we see one incident depends on one prior to it and gives rise to one after it. Everything that we find in this world can be brought in a chain of dependence like this. Nothing can originate without depending on something else previous to it, and no originated thing can be conceived of, which does not give rise to something else in its turn. Thus the process goes on. Anything can be traced upwards to where it originated from and everything can also be traced downwards to that which is produced depending on it.

3. Question of the First Cause

Here an objection can be raised as to what was the **first cause** or where does the process of **causation end**?

In primitive times, people saw the wonders of nature and became curious to get some satisfactory explanation of them. Being ignorant of the Law of Dependent Origination and out of fear of the unknown forces of nature, they naturally tried to explain them by superstitious belief in gods or goddesses. The primitive man believed that the wind blows because the Wind God goes in a procession to get married. If science had accepted it and did not trace it according to the Law of Dependent Origination, we would not have known that the movement of wind is due to differences of atmospheric pressure.

A theistic or superstitious explanation puts an end to all free inquiry. We cannot ask, who created the God or depending on what the God originates. Here there is an absolute check in the advancement of knowledge. The Law of Dependent Origination does not investigate into the first cause, for the very concept of a 'first cause' means a stop to further advancement of knowledge. Regarding the first **beginning of beings**, the Buddha has said: *"Inconceivable, monks, is the beginning of this Samsara (cycle of birth and death), not to be discovered is any first beginning of beings who obstructed by ignorance and ensnared by craving, are running and faring in this round of rebirths"*.

4. Dependent Origination is different from direct causation

The **Law of Causation** as understood by Aristotle and others considers the cause and effect as **two distinct events**, one producing the other. According to Dependent Origination, two events cannot be considered as quite distinct from one another, for there are links of the same process, which admits of no break. No single event in the world is ever isolated. **A cause by itself cannot stand.**

Example:
Clay is the cause of the pot; the medieval logicians assert. Yes, clay is necessary to produce the pot but alone it is not sufficient. If there were no water, no wheel, no potter, no intention of the potter to make a pot, the pot would not have been produced. All these are unavoidable for the production of the pot. If one of them were absent, the pot could not have been produced. Therefore it is not correct to say that the clay is the cause of the pot. The correct expression is '**Depending on clay, the pot is produced**'. Thus the most scientific and rational explanation of a phenomenon is only possible according to the Law of Dependent Origination.

5. Dependent Origination to explain Origin of Suffering

Of all the Teachings of Buddhism, none has given rise to greater misunderstanding, to more contradictory and absurd interpretations, than the doctrine of Dependent Origination. In many cases, there were attempts to present Dependent Origination as an explanation of the primeval beginning of all things and one saw in '**Ignorance**', the **first cause** out of which in the course of time, all conscious and physical life had evolved. All that in spite of the Buddha's repeated and definite declaration that an absolute first beginning of existence is something **unthinkable,** that all such speculation may lead to insanity and that one could never imagine a time when there was no Ignorance and Craving for existence. Why then did the Buddha teach the doctrine of Dependent Origination?

It was to show through which **causes and conditions**, **suffering** comes into being, now and hereafter. It is only through knowing the origin or cause of suffering, that suffering can be removed. The Buddha meditated over the cause of death, decay and misery as He traced them upstream in the chain of Dependent Origination. (The traditional formula of Dependent Origination is given in **Note 1**).

I. <u>What do Decay (*Jara*) and Death (*Marana*) depend on</u>?
They depend on rebirth. After a person is born (*jati*), decay (*jara*), death (*marana*) will follow as a consequence. This is because every ultimate reality has the characteristics of arising (*uppada*), existing (*thiti*) and dissolving (*bhanga*). After arising, existing and dissolving must inevitably follow **Arising is birth**, **existing is decay** and **dissolving is death**. So decay and death must inevitably follow rebirth. They are the **primary effects** of rebirth As a consequence of rebirth, sorrow (*soka*), lamentation (*parideva*), pain (*dukkha*), grief (*domanassa*) and despair (*upayasa*) may also arise. These five types of suffering are not primary or inevitable consequences of rebirth. They are **secondary effects** and may or may not arise depending on conditions. They are absent in *brahma-loka* and may also be unknown to the embryo, which dies in the womb or in an egg.

II. <u>What does Rebirth (*Jati*) depend on</u>?
Rebirth depends on Becoming. The Process of Becoming is of two kinds: (i) ***Kamma*-Process** (*kamma-bhava*) being the active side of existence, and (ii) **Rebirth Process** (*uppatti-bhava*), being the passive *kamma*-resultant side of existence. Here 'Becoming' means ***kamma-bhava***, the *Kamma* Process that conditions rebirth. The Buddha describes it as (1) **unwholesome actions** that lead to rebirth in the woeful states, (2) **wholesome actions** that lead to rebirth in the happy sensual and material planes, and (3) **imperturbable actions (*anenjhabi*)** that lead to rebirth in the formless planes. According to the Buddha, all beings are born of their *kamma*. Although volition is present whenever there is bodily, verbal or mental action, in the case of an *Arahant* that volition is **not accompanied by craving** at the end of each impulsive moment, and it completely disappears without leaving any trace and without transforming it into ***kamma***. Hence there is no rebirth for the *Arahant*. In this sense we should understand that ***kamma-bhava*** is the condition for rebirth. In the ever-repeated rounds of rebirth, no ego-entity or soul is to be found except these conditionally arising and passing away phenomena.

III. <u>What does the Process of Becoming (*Bhava*) depend on</u>?
The Process of Becoming depends on Clinging (***Upadana***). All beings except the *Arahant* cling to existence and sensual pleasures. There are four kinds of Clinging, namely: (1) **sensuous** clinging (*kamupadana*), (2) clinging to **wrong views** (*ditthupadana*), (3) clinging to **rites and rituals** (*silabbatupadana*) that do not lead to the end of suffering and (4) clinging to **ego-belief** (*attupadana*). Clinging cannot condition the rebirth process directly. It can only condition new *kamma*-processes of becoming. When one is clinging to something due to strong attachment, he will act in one way or another to hold on to the object. In doing so, **new *kamma*-processes** of becoming are performed.

IV. <u>What does Clinging (*Upadana*) depend on</u>?
Clinging depends on Craving (***Tanha***). There are three kinds of craving, namely: (1) **sensuous** craving, (2) craving for **existence** and (3) craving for **non-existence**. The first kind of craving (*kama-tanha*) is tied to six kinds of sensual objects. The craving for existence (*bhava-tanha*) is craving for sensuous pleasures associated with the view of eternalism. The craving for non-existence (*vibhava-tanha*) is craving for sensuous pleasures associated with the view that nothing remains after death, only complete annihilation. Thus *tanha* refers to the six types of craving for the six sense objects. ***Tanha*** is essentially the desire to get an object while the strong attachment or clinging, which develops after getting the object is ***upadana***. All the four types of clinging arise as a result of craving. Sensuous clinging arises as a result of craving for sensuous objects. The clinging to wrong view of the personality or of the self arises due to attachment (*tanha*) to oneself. The clinging to rites and rituals arises from the desire to better oneself out of attachment to the self. Thus the causal relation that **craving conditions clinging** is well justified.

V. <u>What does Craving (*Tanha*) depend on</u>?

Craving depends on Feeling. When there is pleasant feeling, there is craving to enjoy it. Even painful feeling may be a condition to craving, as dependent on painful feeling there may arise the desire and craving for the pain to go away and be replaced by pleasant or even neutral feeling. Neutral feeling (*upekkha vedana*) is neither pleasant nor unpleasant. It is not an absence of feeling, but a kind of subtle pleasure that implies only the absence of unbearable pain.

VI. <u>What does Feeling (*Vedana*) depend on</u>?

Feeling depends on Contact (*Phassa*). Whenever the six sense objects (visible object, sound, taste, smell, touch, thought) impinge on the six sense organs (eye, ear, tongue, nose, body, mind) there arise the six types of consciousness (seeing, hearing, etc.). The conjunction of the three is Contact (*Phassa*) and this gives rise to feeling (*vedana*). *Phassa* and *vedana* arise simultaneously in the same consciousness. However, *phassa* is regarded as the cause and *vedana* the result. In accordance with the six types of consciousness, there are six types of contact and six types of feeling. The impact on the sense organs leads to feeling that may be pleasant, unpleasant or indifferent depending on the nature of the sense-object. If the object is agreeable, there arises pleasant feeling; if disagreeable, unpleasant feeling; if neither agreeable nor disagreeable, the feeling is neutral.

VII. <u>What does Contact (*Phassa*) depend on</u>?

Contact depends on the Six Bases (*Salayatana*), namely: eye and visual object, ear and sound, nose and odour, tongue and taste, body and tactile object, mind and mind-object, without which there would not be any consciousness of the external objects and mental-contact. Again the cause-effect relationship is evident, without a being, soul, creator or chance happening being involved.

VIII. <u>What do the Six Bases (*Salayatana*) depend on</u>?
The Six Bases depend on Mentality and Materiality (*Nama-rupa*). The Six Bases are a name for the **five pairs of physical** sense organs and sense objects and **one pair** of mind and mind-object, the mind being a collective term for the 89 or 101 kinds of consciousness (***citta***) enumerated in the *Abhidhamma* or Higher Philosophy. The 5 physical sense bases are derived from Materiality while the mind base consists of Mentality.

IX. <u>What do Mentality and Materiality (*Nama-rupa*) depend on</u>?
Mentality and Materiality depend on Consciousness (*Vinnana*). The arising of a being consisting of mentality and matter depends on the **Rebirth Consciousness**, for if this consciousness were not to arise, mentality and matter would not arise in the womb (for mammals), egg (for reptiles, birds, fishes) or in beings of spontaneous birth (hell beings, ghosts, demons, deities, brahmas). There is no ego-entity or soul to be found except these conditionally arising and passing away phenomena.

X. <u>What does Consciousness (*Vinnana*) depend on</u>?
Consciousness depends on Volitional Activities (***sankhara***). Here consciousness means those classes of consciousness (including the rebirth consciousness) that are the results of **volitional or intentional actions** done in a former existence. It is very important, but hard to understand how Volitional Activities gives rise to rebirth consciousness. According to the Buddha, on the extinction of the last consciousness together with all mentality and matter, it is ***kamma* that causes** the arising of the rebirth consciousness (as result or ***vipaka***), together with the new mentality and matter in beings who have not eradicated all the defilements. Lack of this understanding usually leads to **wrong views**, namely: the belief in the reincarnation of souls or the belief in annihilation after death. (See details in Chapter VI, .3).

XI. <u>What do Volitional Activities (*Sankhara*) depend on</u>?
Volitional Activities depend upon Ignorance (***Avijja***). According to the *Suttanta* method, ignorance is unknowing of the Four Noble Truths. According to the *Abhidhamma* method, there are eight important objects, which are covered or veiled by *avijja* so that their true nature is not known, namely: the Four Noble Truths of suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the way leading to the cessation of suffering, and unknowing about the past, unknowing about the future, unknowing about the past and future, unknowing about dependent origination.

Volitional Activities are those, either moral or immoral, which are **rooted in Ignorance.** They are also called *kamma*-formations and provide the *kammic* cause for rebirth, thereby prolonging the cycle of birth and death or *samsara.* ***Sankhara*** is the same as ***kamma-bhava*** described in the second chain, in the sense that both condition the rebirth process. The only difference is that *sankhara* pertains to the **past** while *kamma-bhava* pertains to the **present** (**Note 2**).

Because of ignorance of *kamma* and its results, people perform all sorts of unwholesome activities for immediate self-benefit. Because of delusion thinking that sensual pleasures and *jhanic* ecstasy are real forms of happiness, people perform *dana, sila* and *bhavana* so that they can attain such happiness in this life or in future lives through rebirth as men, *devas* or brahmas. Thus people accumulate both moral and immoral *kamma* (*sankhara*) as a result of ignorance.

This is how the Noble Truth of the **Origin of Suffering** is explained by the formula of **Dependent Origination**. When the Four Noble Truths are fully comprehended, **Ignorance** is completely eradicated. Concerning the cause of Ignorance, the Buddha has stated that the origin of Ignorance cannot be found in this endless cycle of rebirths.

6. Reverse Order of Dependent Origination to explain the Cessation of Suffering

i) Without Ignorance, there are no Volitional Activities.
ii) Without Volitional Activities, there is no Consciousness.
iii) Without Consciousness, there are no Mentality and Matter.
iv) Without Mentality and Matter, there are no Six Sense Bases.
v) Without the Six Sense Bases, there is no Contact.
vi) Without Contact, there is no Feeling.
vii) Without Feeling, there is no Craving.
viii) Without Craving, there is no Clinging.
ix) Without Clinging, there is no Becoming.
x) Without Becoming, there is no Birth.
xi) Without Birth, there is no Decay, Death and Suffering.

This is how the Noble Truth of the **Extinction of Suffering** is explained by the formula of Dependent Origination. When a person fully comprehends the Four Noble Truth, he becomes an *Arahant*. For the *Arahant* who has completely eradicated Ignorance, the chain of Dependent Origination, also called the **Wheel of Existence** is broken and there is no more rebirth and suffering.

7. References

1) The Buddha-*Dhamma* by Bhikkhu Jagdish Kasyapa M.A.

2) A Discourse on *Paticcasamuppada* by the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw of Burma. Translated by U Aye Maung, March 1982.

3) The Essence of Buddha Abhidhamma (Chapter VIII, Paccaya) by Dr. Mehm Tin Mon. Published by Mehm Tay Zar Mon, Yadanar Min Literature, 15/19 U Wisara Qr., Dagon, Yangon.

8. Explanatory Notes

Note 1: The traditional sequence for the formula of Dependent Origination (*Paticca Samuppada*) is as follows:

i) Through Ignorance conditioned are the Mental Formations (*Avijja paccaya sankhara*)
ii) Through the Mental Formations conditioned is Consciousness (*Sankhara paccaya vinnanam*)
iii) Through Consciousness conditioned are Mentality and Materiality (*Vinnana paccaya Nama-rupam*)
iv) Through Mentality and Materiality conditioned are the Six Sense Bases (*Nama-rupa paccaya Salayatanam*)
v) Through the Six Sense Bases conditioned is Contact (*Salayatana paccaya Phasso*)
vi) Through Contact conditioned is Feeling (*Phassa paccaya Vedana*)
vii) Through Feeling conditioned is Craving (*Vedana paccaya Tanha*)
viii) Through Craving conditioned is Clinging (*Tanha paccaya Upadanam*)
ix) Through Clinging is conditioned the Process of Becoming (*Upadana paccaya Bhavo*)
x) Through the Process of Becoming conditioned is Rebirth (*Bhava paccaya Jati*)
xi) Through Rebirth conditioned are Decay and Death (*Jati paccaya Jara-maranam*)

Note 2: ***Sankhara*** means rebirth-producing volitions (*cetana*) or *kamma*-formations. It is of three types, namely:

a) ***Punnabhi-sankhara***: Wholesome *kamma*-formations of the sense sphere and *rupa jhanas* that lead to rebirth in the happy sensual planes of man and *devas* and the form planes of *brahmas* respectively..
b) ***Apunnabhi-sankhara***: Unwholesome *kamma*-formations that lead to rebirth in the four woeful planes.
c) ***Anenjabhi-sankhara****:* Imperturbable *kamma*-formations of the four *arupa jhanas* that lead to rebirth in the formless planes.

In *Abhidhamma*, *sankhara* represents the 29 types of *kamma* associated with: 8 moral consciousness of the sense sphere, 5 *jhanas* of the form sphere, 12 immoral consciousness and 4 *jhanas* of the formless sphere. Thus *sankhara* and *kammabhava* are the same except that ***sankhara*** pertains to the **past life** while ***kammabhava*** pertains to the **present life**.